

Minnesota Allina Health doctors authorize strike as hospice nurses walk out amid merger with California giant Sutter Health, AI cuts

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More than 130 doctors at Allina Health's Mercy and Unity hospitals in Coon Rapids and Fridley, Minnesota, have voted by a 90 percent margin to authorize a strike. The Doctors Council Service Employees International Union (SEIU) announced the results at a virtual news conference on Wednesday, July 1. However, nearly two weeks later, no date has been set by the union.

The doctors unionized in 2023. Since then, the company has stalled through 60 sessions while refusing to meet the doctors' core demands: cost-of-living adjustments after a year without raises, paid sick leave, an end to noncompete agreements and a voice in how artificial intelligence is deployed in patient care.

"A healthcare system that cannot care for its physicians is not going to be able to care for the people that it promises to care for in this community," Dr. Alia Sharif at Allina Health told CBS News. She pointed to service closures, patients boarded in emergency departments and Allina's shuttering of four Twin Cities clinic locations last year. "Too often, we watch decisions that prioritize financial pressures over the needs of our communities and patients." Dr. Saul Singh was blunt: "I hope this wakes up Allina. We need to see change."

The doctors describe being worked like factory hands on an assembly line, buried under rising caseloads and paperwork dictated by far-away bosses.

But the 90 percent vote has not produced a strike date. The union must give 10 days' notice, and the bureaucracy is using that requirement as cover to stall. Every day without a date is a day the union is searching for a way to block the walkout or cap it at a token one-day action.

The doctors cannot wait for the bureaucracy to act.

They must form a rank-and-file committee now to enforce their democratic decision.

Five days after the authorization vote, on July 6, 65 Allina hospice nurses walked off the job, picketing outside Abbott Northwestern Hospital in Minneapolis in a one-day strike before returning to work Tuesday. The nurses unionized in spring 2025 with SEIU Healthcare Minnesota & Iowa and have been negotiating their first contract for nearly a year.

Susie Smerz, a hospice nurse and member of the union's bargaining team, told MPR News that unlike Allina's hospital nurses, hospice workers receive no overtime or holiday pay. They work 18-hour days, crisscrossing the metro area, for the same salary they would get for lighter hours. "We're not interested in working for free, we're not interested in being exhausted, we're not interested in being the sacrifice," Smerz said. Allina's response was standard corporate boilerplate: The company was "disappointed" and insisted "the bargaining table is the best place to reach an agreement."

The strike authorization and the one-day walkout are the latest flashpoints in a decade-long class war at Allina, in which the union bureaucracy has limited and isolated a series of struggles.

In 2016, 4,800 nurses at five Allina hospitals launched an open-ended strike against demands that they gut their health benefits and accept heavier workloads. The Massachusetts Nurses Association (MNA) isolated them, settling at every other hospital system and leaving Allina nurses to fight alone for 37 days. The MNA soon rammed through a concessionary deal.

In September 2020, the SEIU called off a planned

strike at Allina after management threatened legal action. The bureaucracy surrendered before a single worker walked off the job.

In October 2022, 260 Allina mental health workers began a three-day strike. The SEIU called off a parallel strike by 130 M Health Fairview workers at the last minute, isolating the Allina workers. That same year, the MNA capped 15,000 Minnesota nurses at a three-day walkout.

In November 2025, over 600 Allina clinic physicians, PAs and nurse practitioners held the first doctors' strike in Minnesota history and the largest in US history. The union limited it to one day. This spring the workers voted to strike indefinitely before the union rushed through a three-year contract.

Behind all of this looms the Sutter Health merger. The Sacramento-based giant announced in March that Allina would join it as the Upper Midwest Division, creating a combined \$26 billion system with 39 hospitals, more than 400 care sites, 88,000 employees and over 5 million patients annually. Sutter is committing \$2 billion to Allina's markets—investments aimed at “enhancing AI and digital health capabilities” and deploying “AI and digital solutions that would reduce administrative burdens for caregivers.”

Allina, which posted a \$95.4 million operating loss last year, is being absorbed by a larger system that has made clear its intention to slash labor costs. While the doctors' union and the nurses' union have stated their opposition to the deal, their response has been limited to legalistic appeals. They refuse to mobilize workers to stop the merger through coordinated strike action.

But the merger, the AI-driven austerity and the unions' betrayals are not local problems. The same US government pouring hundreds of billions of dollars into the illegal war of aggression against Iran—launched February 28 of this year—presides over the looting of the healthcare system. The bombs falling on Iran and the AI algorithms being deployed to slash jobs at Allina are paid for through increased exploitation of the working class. The assault on healthcare, the destruction of democratic rights and the march to war are one and the same offensive.

There is enormous potential to develop these struggles into a broader fight. But that requires a fight against the union bureaucracy. Allina workers must

move now to take this struggle out of the hands of the SEIU and MNA by forming independent rank-and-file committees.

Such committees must unite doctors, nurses, hospice workers and mental health workers across Allina around common demands, plan coordinated strike action that cannot be picked off one by one and reach out to other workers in the Twin Cities and beyond.



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